



CAMBRIDGE HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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Date: July 26, 2006

To: Members of the Historical Commission

From: Sarah L. Burks, Preservation Planner

Re: D-1067: 188 Prospect Street
D-1068: 190 Prospect Street

An application to demolish the commercial building and garage at 188 Prospect Street and the six-family residential building at 190 Prospect Street was received on July 12, 2006. The applicant was notified of an initial determination of significance for the commercial building and the six-family residence, and a public hearing was scheduled for August 3. The concrete block garage is not considered to be significant. Another building at 17½ Tremont Street abuts the lot and is proposed for demolition, but it was not determined to be significant.

Site & Planning Considerations

The buildings are located on the east side of Prospect Street between Broadway and Gardner Road. The development site includes several parcels, including:

- lot 87-4 (6,400 square feet, assessed at \$506,600),
- lot 87-5 (12,449 square feet, assessed at \$882,700), and
- lot 87-146 (5,100 square feet, assessed at \$398,100).

The site is located in a Residence C-1 zone, which permits an FAR of 0.75 and has a 35' height limit. Residential projects of 10,000 square feet or more or 10 or more units are required to have 15% of the units available as affordable, and there is, in turn, a 30% FAR bonus. In the C-1 zone, this results in an FAR allowance of .975.

The current proposal is to renovate half of a double house at 184 Prospect Street, demolish the one-story commercial building at 188, the garage at the rear of 188, the six-family residence at 190 Prospect Street, and the house at 17½ Tremont Street. The replacement new construction would consist of a 4-story 16-unit building at 190 Prospect Street, seven townhouse units behind, and two single-family dwellings on the Tremont Street lot. The applicant has submitted plan and elevation drawings for the project.

The Community Development Department has recently completed a study of the Prospect Street Corridor from Massachusetts Avenue to the Somerville Line.

The recommendation, which have not yet been presented to the Planning Board or City Council, is to designate the corridor as an area of special planning concern, requiring larger projects to participate in a public development consultation process. Other objectives of the area are to:

1. improve urban design including shielding auto repair and service uses from the street and abutters,
2. improve the pedestrian experience by encouraging trees, landscaping and widened sidewalks, by creating a minimum 3' front yard requirement, 15% open space, and street trees every 25',
3. reducing surface parking along the sidewalk or creating landscaped buffers,
4. requiring active uses at the ground floor to maintain a vibrant and safe street, and
5. reducing the number and width of curb cuts.

Though the current development is not subject to these new requirements, it is relevant to understand the planning objectives for the street and impact these draft recommendations may have on future developments.

Architectural Description

188 Prospect Street

The one-story commercial building at 188 Prospect Street (also listed as 186 in earlier records) is 18' wide and 36' deep and has a basement. The store was designed in 1912 by architect Nathan Douglas. Its façade is arranged for one storefront, with a center entrance and two large plate glass windows that angle in to meet the recessed entry door. The flat roof extends beyond the walls of the store with wide eaves. The façade is detailed with ornamental rafter tails and dentils across the front and wrapping around the corners, continuing approximately 5' on the sides. A large quarter round molding decorates the cornice. The corner pilasters are paneled with a flat field at the center and square trim around the outside. Clapboards cover the front wall behind the signboard. The side walls were likewise clad with clapboards, but red asphalt shingle siding was added in 1946. The front door is not original and dates to the late twentieth century.



188 Prospect Street, photo submitted with application on 7/14/2006

190 Prospect Street

The six-unit residence is three stories tall, with a high parged foundation and a flat roof. The entire building is covered with beige vinyl siding, except the front and side porches, which are 1963 alterations constructed of T-111 plywood with concrete steps. The windows are wood 2-over-2 double-hung sash with aluminum storms. The fenestration is symmetrical, with the façade organized into three bays. The front door is located on the left and consists of a paneled wood door with a glazed top half and adjacent sidelights. The building has two chimneys, one in the front half of the building toward the south side and an exterior chimney on the east (rear) wall of the building. Iron fire escapes are installed on the building on the north and east walls. The building resembles an unornamented three-decker with no bays or decorative cornice and does not give indication of its original 1830s construction date or the late date (1947) of its conversion to six apartments.



190 Prospect St. (left) 188 Prospect St. (center) and, 180-184 Prospect St. (far right), photo submitted with application on 7/14/2006

The building was originally constructed as a single-family residence, built ca. 1836. It was a 2½-story house situated gable end facing the street, with a 2-story gabled ell. The house had 1-story porches that wrapped around the west (front) and south sides. Two chimneys were located on the south side of the roof. By 1894, the ell had grown to include a small shed-roofed rear addition and a bay window facing south.

The city directories indicate that two families were living in the house as early as 1910 and three families in the 1910s and 1920s. But building permits document an 18' x 35' addition for a second unit in January 1947, designed by architect M. Walters. This work was followed quickly by an October 1947 permit to convert the two-family dwelling into four apartments and to construct two additional apartments. No architect is listed for the conversion. Unfortunately, we do not have a good photograph of the house prior to these major alterations.

An outbuilding at the rear of the building was moved, enlarged, and altered many times over the years. It began as a barn and was converted to an automotive repair garage in the twentieth century. It was demolished in 1944.

The buildings on either side of 190 Prospect Street include the Maria Baldwin House (a side gabled Greek Revival double house at 194-196 Prospect Street) and a front gabled Greek Revival double house at 180-184 Prospect Street. Across the street is a two-story apartment building, formerly the Cantabrigia Nursing Home, which was built in 1965.

Current Condition

The current condition of the store appears to be good. The asphalt shingles on the sidewalls obscure the condition of the clapboards below, but no major problems are evident on the cornice, roof, or front elevation.

The six-family residence, however, is in fair to poor condition. The concrete stucco on the foundation is cracked and it's unknown whether the cracks carry into the brick or stone foundation behind. The front porch, constructed of T-111, has no remaining structural integrity.

History

The Prospect Street neighborhood on either side of Broadway began to grow in the second stage of Cambridgeport's development, and by the 1840s became one of the most prestigious areas in the new section. Prospect Street was laid out by Middlesex County in 1804 to provide a route from Charlestown to the Western Avenue and River Street bridges. Residential development began in the late 1830s and flourished in the early to mid 1840s.

Broadway in the vicinity of Broadway Common was a prestigious street, but was outdone by the neighborhood around the Valentine-Fuller House at 125 Prospect Street (1848) and the Prospect Congregational Church at 99 Prospect Street (1851). This section was the most prestigious and elegant in Cambridgeport from the late 1840s to the 1880s. In the late 1890s, however, Prospect Street was widened to accommodate electric street cars; most of the street trees were cut down at that time. The Valentine-Fuller house was replaced by a First National Store in 1937, leading the way for expanded commercial uses in the 1940s and 50s.

The land and house at 190 Prospect Street was first taxed in 1836 to owner James Wyman, about whom little is known. He does not appear in Cambridge City Directories but owned five properties in Cambridge between 1835-1855. Robert Douglass, a wealthy banker, owned the house from 1839-1845. James J. Eaton, who purchased the property in 1845, was a cigar dealer at Long Wharf in Boston. Charles B. Siders, who purchased the property in the 1880s, operated a taxi service from the Eastern Railroad Depot in Boston. He resided at the house until the late 1890s. Michael F. Hanifen, a manager at a Boston office, was the last single-family occupant of the house. By 1910, the house was broken up into two units and then three by 1913. The residents were working class including teamsters, a nurse, and a carpenter. Of interest, was Thomas A. Gannon, who operated an ice cream manufacturing business in the basement. The house was converted into six apartments in 1947. By the 1950s, the tenants were primarily students and young professionals.

The store at 188 Prospect Street was constructed in 1912 by owner Thomas A. Gannon. It was designed by architect Nathan Douglas. Douglas was a prolific

local architect with an office on Harvard Street. He designed dozens of three deckers, apartment houses, and stores between 1901-1927. Some of his larger commissions included the Beth Israel Synagogue at 238 Columbia Street (1901) and the Swedish Evangelical Church at 146 Hampshire Street (1902).

The first business to occupy the store was Thomas A. Gannon's ice cream store. He manufactured the ice cream in the basement of the house at #190 and sold it from the store next door. Gannon died in 1914 and his successor was H. L. Fowler. Fowler's advertisement in the 1914 city directory lists the inventory as including ice cream, baked goods, and home made candies. He occupied the store until 1918. The next business to occupy the space was the Cambridge Funeral Company, operated by Daniel L. Shea, a Somerville resident. The only logical connection I can imagine for these otherwise disparate uses is that there must have been a good freezer in the building. Other shops that have occupied the space have included another confectionery, furniture sales and refinishing, tire sales and service, bicycle seat covers and upholstery, and a photographic gallery.

Prospect Street began to see infill development related to garaging and repair of automobiles in the 1920s and 1930s. A 15-space garage was constructed in the back yard of the Maria Baldwin House in 1919. The original barn at 190 Prospect was moved to the back of the lot and converted to an automotive repair garage in the 1920s. Even the store at 188 Prospect Street had a use related to automobiles for a time. According to the Sanborn map, it housed a tire sales and service business in the late 1940s or early 1950s. This incremental encroachment of the automobile, first for garages and service shops and later for on-grade parking lots has, over time, changed the character of Prospect Street. Some of the planning study's design recommendations may help to mitigate that effect in the future.

Significance and Recommendation

The store at 188 Prospect Street is significant as a rare example of a single-unit one-story frame commercial building. Much of the retail space on Prospect Street is either of a larger scale, such as at the Central Square end, or of twentieth century construction. The house is significant for its associations with the broad architectural, cultural, and economic history of Cambridge in that its evolution directly reflects the rise and fall of residential development along Prospect Street from the mid nineteenth to the mid twentieth century. It is also important as a placeholder on the streetscape, which is beginning to be revitalized and concerted planning efforts made to enhance the pedestrian experience and encourage improved urban design of new developments.

A detailed inspection of the buildings was not made. More could be revealed about the current condition of the buildings. It is the staff recommendation that the Commission hear testimony from the petitioners and neighbors and carefully review the plans for replacement construction before making a further determination.

cc: David Aposhian



Property Map for 188-190 Prospect Street
City of Cambridge, Massachusetts

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